

Mental Health Condition of Veterinary Practitioners in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Every profession has its professional stresses. In Bangladesh, the Veterinary profession is older. However, till now, it is not widespread due to several obstacles, and veterinary practitioners have to deal with these problems. There is a scarcity of veterinary professionals in Bangladesh, and the diagnostic tools are insufficient. The field condition of this sector is another problematic issue. A considerable number of quacks are providing services to the rural people of Bangladesh. The graduates are not able to do their private practice smoothly. So veterinary practitioners have to suffer more and more. This study represented the mental health condition and stressors of this profession. Google forms were provided for data collection through WhatsApp. This study used the Likert scale for the result and findings. In other countries, suicidal tendency is prevalent among veterinarians. However, till now, it is not typical case for vets to commit suicide in Bangladesh. However, the major problem in this study is professional burnout. Several other stressors led a veterinarian to face severe mental issues. In this study, it is seen that the socio Economic condition of a vet was not bad at all, But they had to face professional and social bullying. This study will help to reduce the stressors and provide a good and sound professional environment which will lead to mental problems and a free healthy, and wealthy life.

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INTRODUCTION

There are many professions where the stress is unbearable and extreme and causes many mental problems. Medical science approaches such disciplines where satisfaction is quite challenging to acquire. Quite hard work is needed in the veterinary profession. This profession has versatile sectors. So the graduates, after the study, have to face the problem of selecting the appropriate field. Otherwise, it is tough to maintain a good life without stress-free conditions. In Bangladesh, this Veterinary profession is now achieving popularity. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the job is exhausting veterinarians (vets) more. There are many reasons for this study.

Mental condition is considered good when an individual is socially, emotionally and psychologically sound. A person's mental well-being influences efficiency, performance, and relationship with others. So it is imperative to be mentally tough. Sound mental health also helps a person to do the job or assigned work properly. A vet should always be mentally healthy. But it is a matter of great concern that veterinary professionals suffer from various mental problems. The initial mental problems are usually lack of energy, lack of sleep and damage the assets or harming self and others.

The veterinary profession is becoming increasingly concerned about mental health and job unhappiness. There has not been much research on how identification affects veterinarians' psychological health. According to studies, vets are more than twice as likely to commit suicide as doctors. Approximately vets are four times more susceptible to suicide offending. The population of professionals suffering from low well-being, poor mental health, depression, burnout, and compassionate fatigue is hidden by this statistic, representing the tip of the iceberg. Work can be a significant factor in promoting employees' health and well-being, improving workplace productivity and profitability. Much conjecture has been made regarding the potential causes of the higher suicide risk in the profession. Data collected on the suicide fatality rates of veterinarians from 1979 to 2014 were made public by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention division. In the 36-year study, suicide deaths among male veterinarians were 2.1 times more likely than those of the general population, while those of female veterinarians were 3.5 times more

likely. Veterinary medicine has evolved since James Herriot's time. Veterinarians now provide more advanced treatments, and so prices have increased. The speed is quick, and society has changed, with higher expectations than ever. The industry experiences many of the same stresses as other industries, including high levels of stress, long hours, low relative pay rates, a lack of support, and a poor work-life balance, but there are other issues as well (Cavanagh, 2020).

The majority of veterinary professionals and employees are overworked and understaffed. Veterinarians and other veterinary professionals are in limited supply both nationwide and worldwide. As a result, it causes stress and burnout among professionals all day long. In Bangladesh, the number of veterinarians is relatively tiny to the need. It also creates various problems for both service and stakeholders. Because we love animals and want to spend our lives caring for them, many of us in the veterinary field selected this line of employment. Every patient is not always a success. Our daily lives include euthanasia in order to end the pain. Even worse, sometimes, we are compelled by financial constraints to put animals with treatable diseases to sleep. Animal abuse and neglect cases are something we deal with frequently, and the emotions involved are beyond words. In overcrowded shelters, some veterinarians must put many animals to death. All of this causes depression occasionally and compassion fatigue.

Veterinarians have a very high debt-to-income ratio. We have the same years of education as a doctor, yet we only make a small portion of what they do. The average veteran leaves school with a mountain of debt that will take our whole career to repay. The cost of veterinary care is high, which includes pricey prescriptions, hefty lab costs and expensive equipment. Many businesses do not make any money at all. In comparison to human medicine, we merely charge a tiny fraction of the price for the same service. Nevertheless, the cost of providing medicine remains high. Pet parents who are dealing with a seriously ill animal frequently find this to be quite distressing. It can also be an emergency, which is worse. However, those upset over this frequently lash out against animal rescuers. Threats, yelling, cyberbullying, and occasionally even physical damage are somewhat prevalent. I have received multiple death threats, violent warnings, and unfounded social media slanders, along with several of my staff colleagues. It can devastate our mental health when this begins continuously (Hughes, 2021).

In Bangladesh, there are very few veterinary professionals, but the mental condition is still under quality. The service quality is below the mark due to the animal population and vets ratio.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the stressors
2. Identify the ways how the stressors affect the veterinary professionals' mental health.
3. To search for the most common mental problem of veterinary professionals in Bangladesh.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Merck Animal Health (MAH) conducted an investigation into the mental health and well-being of veterinarians in the United States (MAH), and the findings were published (1). The study was conducted as a result of multiple articles showing a high suicide incidence among veterinarians, which is connected to an abnormally high degree of mental suffering, a significant problem with high student debt, and issues with burnout and compassion fatigue. There is an investigation of the mental health and well-being of veterinarians in the USA was given to a research team. The team planned a study to ascertain whether there is a mental health crisis in the field in the US, to pinpoint the causes of the crisis, if there is one, and to offer guidance on how to handle it (Gyles, 21018).

The following stressors have been identified explicitly for use in this study: occupational burnout, access to controlled substances, knowledge of assisted suicide, compassion fatigue, client complaints, client expectations, ethical dilemmas, financial stress resulting from student or professional debt, cyberbullying at work, practice demands, practice management responsibilities, competition between practices, and making mistakes in the workplace. Occupational Burnout is one of the crucial stressors for the veterinary practitioner, which was previously studied (Nett et al., 2015; Bartram and Baldwin, 2008). Feelings of tiredness, cynicism, and inadequacy are frequently linked to burnout, which is generally understood to be a persistent reaction to ongoing emotional and relational pressures (Maslach et al., 2001). Because of the frequent client interactions and emotionally

charged events in the healthcare industry, it is believed that burnout may play a role in suicidal thoughts (Chopra et al. 2004, Van der Heijden et al. 2008). This study investigated burnout as a potential stressor influencing the elevated suicide rate among veterinarians.

Euthanasia means killing the animal for its welfare. When an animal is suffering from no curable diseases, vets have to kill the animal using anaesthesia. However, this treatment causes severe mental stress to veterinary professionals (Bartram and Baldwin 2008, Neeleman et al. 1997, Tran et al. 2014). The two opposing hypotheses contend that knowledge about euthanasia either increases or decreases the likelihood that a person may consider suicide. Euthanasia knowledge may be a stressor, but there is data to support and refute both; therefore, further research is required.

Another stressor affecting the high suicide rate among veterinarians is access to suicide tools (Charlton 1995). The often employed method of restricting access to means of suicide is not practical since it would interfere with veterinarians' capacity to practice; yet, it could be a stressor to take into account as a potential influence on the greater tendency of veterinarians to commit suicide.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was formed using Google Forms and distributed to 200 veterinary professionals in different regions of Bangladesh through WhatsApp messages. Then there were 159 responses. Data analysis was performed the Microsoft Excel software. In this research, quantitative and qualitative data were used for the result. The 200 vets were in Bangladesh and different countries but graduated from different Bangladeshi institutes. The study will be done by the year of May – June 2022. After sending the messages, there were regular notifications for the response. Demographic-based questions sampling gender, age, years of practising and sector of practice were included. The study was performed, and information was collected about job satisfaction, future occupational plans, occupational influence on mental health, and knowledge of mental health in the veterinary field. All questions, disregarding demographics, were scored on a 1-5 Likert Scale, which was kept similar across domains in order to maintain internal consistency.

RESULTS

Google form was prepared, and the responses were analyzed. The responses of the demographic respondents are separated and analyzed. The table of the analysis is given below:

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents

Demography		Total	Responses	Percentage of respondents
Gender	Males	145	110	75%
	Females	55	49	89%
Age	23-30 yrs	85	77	90%
	31-45 yrs	62	52	83%
	> 45 yrs	53	30	56%
Years Practicing	< 5yrs	96	85	88%
	5-20 yrs	74	57	77%
	> 20 yrs	30	17	56%
Sector of practice	Small animals	35	34	97%
	Large animals	107	80	74%
	Poultry	58	45	77%

Here the Likert scale was used to measure the veterinarians' condition in four common statements.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Believe I made the right career the choice to become a Veterinarian.	38	32	79	10	0
	23.89%	20.12%	49.68%	6.32%	0
I plan on leaving, or have already left the veterinary field.	45	88	0	0	26
	28.30%	55.34%	0	0	16.35%
I feel as though my role in the veterinary field has had a negative effect on my mental health.	67	75	0	17	0
	42.14%	47.17%	0	10.68%	0
I believe suicide rates are higher among veterinarians than the general public.	15	18	28	98	0
	9.43%	11.32%	17.61%	61.63%	0

Ten occupational stressors were selected by following some review of the literature; then questionnaire was formed with these occupational stressors. In the following table, the Likert scale measurement was used for the severity of the stressors influencing the mental health condition.

Table 3: Occupational stressors

Stressors	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree
Occupational burnout is severe	111	5	41	0	2
	69.811%	3.14%	25.78%	0	1.25%
Many complaints from clients	146	13	0	0	0
	91.82%	8.17%	0	0	0
Difficult to fill up the clients' expectations	69	55	31	4	0
	43.39%	34.59%	19.49%	2.51%	0
Presence of financial problems	13	38	53	0	55
	8.17%	2.89%	33.33%	0	34.59%
Presence of ethical challenges	21	33	52	14	39
	13.20%	20.75%	32.70%	8.80%	24.53%
Having more demands of practice	158	1	0	0	0
	99.37%	0.62%	0	0	0
Is there any familiarity with Euthanasia	87	54	18	0	0
	54.71%	33.96%	11.32%	0	0
Presence of professional errors	24	34	55	36	10
	15.09%	21.38%	34.59%	22.64%	6.29%
Experience of cyberbullying	0	6	8	5	140
	0	3.77%	5.03%	3.14%	88.05%
Presence of competition	123	36	0	0	0
	77.35%	22.64%	0	0	0

DISCUSSIONS

Regarding demographic responses, females were highly responsive, 89%. In other developed countries, the number of female vets is much more than males. But in Bangladesh, the condition is quite the opposite, and the number of female practitioners is relatively less and insignificant.

Regarding age demographic characteristics, the 23-30 years old people group is the highest responsive, 90%. Similarly, for the practitioners who have practised for less than five years, the response percentage is 88%. So it can be said that the young people are responsive here in large numbers. Small animal practitioners are the highest in response; small animal practice in Bangladesh is uncommon. But they are very responsible and participate in all kinds of interviews. For that reason, the small animals' practice is quite common in city or town regions. On the other hand, large animal and poultry practitioners are practising in rural regions. It is one of the causes of less response. There were four common statements. "Believe I made the right career choice in becoming a Veterinarian" – in this statement, the neutral response percentage is the highest in number, 79%. "I plan on leaving, or have already left, the veterinary field" in this statement, the neutral response is 55.34%. 41.17% of veterinary practitioners agreed, "I feel as though my role in the veterinary field has had a negative effect on my mental health". 61.63% of vets did not believe that suicide rates are higher among veterinarians than the general public.

In the case of Occupational stressors, the responses, The Vets, strongly agreed on occupational burnout as a severe problem in this profession. About 69.81% of practitioners thought that this problem was very severe due to the lack of diagnostic facilities scarcity. So there were many complaints from clients. 91.82% of the responses strongly agreed. Vets thought it was pretty challenging to meet the client's expectations. 43.39% of vets strongly agreed on this topic. But veterinary practitioners felt that there was no financial problem in vets' life if he or they practised regularly. The veterinary profession has high ethical values. So it is difficult to maintain and face ethical challenges. 32.70% of vets were neutral here. Because in Bangladesh, animal welfare is hampered by everyone. However, many veterinary practitioners are

trying to hold ethical values. 99.37% of vets had more demands of practice. It made them very competitive and depressed also. One of the essential stressors for the vet is performing euthanasia. It is complicated to decide the killing of animals for their well-being and the owner's well-being. So in the study, 54.71% of vets strongly agreed that they were in a fix and getting depressed during euthanasia. New vets usually face the problem of professional errors. 34.59% of vets gave a neutral response in case of professional errors. It is quite common for novice practitioners. But after a while, all of the practitioners can be good ones. In Bangladesh, people are bullying the vets directly. However, cyberbullying is still now uncommon here. 88.05% of responses strongly disagreed. Where any completion is present, the sector is quite tricky, and the competition is a stressor. 77.35% of veterinary professionals strongly agreed that there is competition in the veterinary sector in Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

After the study, it was said that the female vets were fewer in number, but they were quite responsive. The younger ones were doing well but were getting frustrated and planning to leave the profession. The majority of doctors were found to be unsatisfied with their jobs and had more stress among them. Factors like age, educational status and severity of stress emerged as potential, influential factors. Workload; pay and benefits; autonomy; safety and security; and workload were associated with more dissatisfaction. So it influences to leave the sector. The veterinary profession in Bangladesh is entirely ignored. Sometimes graduates undergo a horrible type of depression. Because there are a large number of quacks practising in Bangladesh, some of them have no educational qualifications. In Bangladesh, some universities give DVM degrees, Combined degrees of

DVM and Animal Husbandry. They are considered registered veterinarians. Excluding them, some other institutions give diploma degrees in veterinary medicine. In this country, quacks are doing the treatment in the villages, and they also make some syndicates to hamper the work of a young veterinarian. It is a matter of great concern that no regular regulatory authority monitors the work in the veterinary sector. Some random mobile court activities are performed. But it is not

quite enough to control the activities of the quacks. It is necessary to take efficient measures to stop the unusual activities of the quacks. It will help to meet up the desires of young novice vets to practice at the field level. Here it should be mentioned that some of the vets are sometimes thinking about suicide, also. There are also brain drain activities. Young, efficient veterinary practitioners also leave the country because of ignorance. The research reported here may provide a solid foundation for future research on the problem of veterinarians in Bangladesh. It is hoped that this study can draw attention to a population that is understudied and encourage the collection of valuable data that can be used to implement programs to combat mental health problems in the veterinary profession. If workplace stressors are reduced, and the mental health of veterinarians improves, the profession will have a more positive mental outlook for its participants at all levels.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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